

quantity) = available quantity. So at any one time you can run a report that details what is available at your facility. First Step Greenhouses also uses barcode labels on each unit and a handheld scanner to facilitate inventory data collection. Tracking inventory also enables the user to review his success rate with specific crops (i.e., losses in rooting) and assures you are selling inventory you have.

A production schedule can be derived two ways with Plant Partner. The user can develop a plan from projected sales or can schedule based on actual orders in the system. When scheduling from anticipated sales the user determines the total quantity of a container size needed for each sales week. This number is then divided and divided again based on percentages of each item desired. This is a form of hierarchy that flows as follows: container\_genus\_species or series\_color. For example, starting with the total container number of X this is divided as follows; 10% of X is *Impatiens*, 50% of the *Impatiens* are Super Elfin, 4% of the Super Elfin will be white.

The other way of scheduling is based on orders in the system. The program scans all orders and calculates when the item needs to be planted based on crop times. The number is then increased to account for a given spoilage percent anticipated. You can then run reports telling what items need planting on a given week.

The production side has an equivalent to the previously described sales catalog; it is called the production library. The user inputs information critical to production of the crops in this library. Each crop has its own card containing data relevant only to that crop. Information contained includes: crop times, number of cells or plants in the container, anticipated spoilage percent, and tasks and materials needed to produce the crop. Partitioning the year into different segments creates crop times. This helps to overcome weather and production time changes created by it. For each segment of the year you can define different crop times, sell windows, spoilage percents, materials, and tasks.

Once production is scheduled, reports are available to facilitate production. Reports available include sow sheets and material usage and labor needs.

In the authors opinion it is critical to have a program that integrates both the selling and producing functions of the business. This enables a healthier tighter link between these two often divided and embattled departments of the business. One must also realize that any software package developed for our industry will not run like Microsoft Office. The user should anticipate problems or "bugs" since the software company is operating on limited funds from a limited customer base. Be prepared to have yourself or an employee be the babysitter or "guru" of the system. The initial time investment to set up a system can be significant, but the rewards are also.

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## Question and Answer Period: Concurrent Session I: Perennials and Plugs

**Mary Helen Seeger:** Is there a way to integrate sales via computer modem or the Internet?

**Martin Stockton:** Not that I know of, but they can probably develop a custom program to handle that. That gets back to the concept of small industry, if you want to be an innovator or fore-runner you will likely pay for it.